

The Superior Eternal Priest

God and Priest

In my study this week I found that many pastors and commentators pass over verses 20 to 28 of Hebrews chapter 7 because they feel it is redundant to verses 11 to 19. But God would not have inspired these words if He did not have something to teach us. I believe the writer builds a solid foundation beginning in chapter 1 for the superiority of Jesus Christ above everything in the universe and this theme is woven throughout this epistle. He began in chapter 5 building the relationship between Melchizedekian priesthood and the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ and now he ends chapter 7 with continuing this theme. Today you will be exposed to history and linguistics as well as the Word of God to gain understanding of this passage.

The Jews of the first century would have been very familiar with the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic law. Think how difficult it would have been for them to grasp the truth of the nullifying of the Mosaic law and the Levitical generational priesthood by the Messiah. We all resist change and can be products of our upbringing. For centuries the Jews had worshiped God through the Levitical priesthood and now it is defunct and canceled. As the writer of Hebrews stated earlier, “For when there is *a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.*” (Hebrews 7:12) The word “**change**” signals something important. The word “**change**” found twice in verse 12 comes from the Greek word *metatithēmi* (met-a-tee-hem-me), which means “to put one thing in place of another.” Christ changed the law or replaced the man-made laws with God’s law only and brought His grace, mercy and love by His New Law and New Covenant. The old Mosaic law is removed and there no longer is a human priest between man and God - for

Jesus is the eternal Priest and law fulfiller. Not only was the Levitical priesthood removed but so were the man-made laws.

In this chapter, the author develops his argument on the basis of 4 verses in the Old Testament. He takes the Jew's own scriptures and expounds upon them. He is presenting to us - the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that of the Levitical priesthood. Today's message is both a history lesson and a clear teaching that Jesus as High Priest and King is superior to all creation. All the arguments that the writer developed in the 28 verses of chapter 7, all of the details, all of the interlaced points are derived from 4 verses in the Old Testament; 3 from Genesis chapter 14 and 1 from the Psalm 110.

We begin by reading from Genesis chapter 14 beginning at verse 18, **“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’ And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”** The second is from king David's Psalm 110, **“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’ ”** The writer of Hebrews takes these verses and expands on them to build his logical argument; **in verses 1 to 10 he teaches the greatness of Melchizedek, in verses 11 to 19 we are taught that the new priesthood supersedes the old and today in verses 20 to 28 the writer shows us the superiority of the new priesthood.** One thing all these verses teach is; **Christ has accomplished for us what the Levitical priesthood never could.**

In verses 20-22, the writer draws one more point from those Old Testament verses. He uses Psalm 110 verse 4 to provide another link in the chain of the argument which demonstrates the superiority of the order of Melchizedek to that of Aaron and Levi. The Melchizedekian priesthood is greater, because it was **established with an oath**. In verse 20 the writer demonstrates Christ became a priest after the order of Melchizedek with an **oath** from God. The writer had used this argument already in chapter 6, verse 13 and

recorded God's promise to Abraham was sealed by an **oath**. So, in verse 21 it is made clear that the Aaronic priesthood was made **without an oath** from God. Here, however, the writer quotes Psalm 110 says, **the Lord swore an oath to Himself** that Christ would be the High Priest of Salvation forever and the oath of God is eternal.

To be clear Aaron was not made a priest with an oath, reading from Exodus chapter 28, verse 1, God instructed Moses saying, **“Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests...”** This verse is the institution, the inauguration of the Aaronic priesthood. That priesthood rested on a divine commandment, but there was no oath. The Old Testament scriptures mention no oath in regard to the Aaronic priesthood. God never said that the Aaronic priesthood would be forever, but he did say Melchizedek's priesthood would be forever. The dignity and greatness of one's priestly office is in direct proportion to the seriousness with which it is instituted. An oath of God always has a defined purpose as Hebrews 6:17 instructs, **“So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath ...”** An oath is not designed to make sure or make more reliable the Word of God. God gives an oath because we humans are trying to understand the divine and He wants us to grasp the importance of what He is saying. God considers the priesthood of Melchizedek to be infinitely more valuable than that of Aaron. Having built his argument, the writer now draws his conclusion in verse 22, **“This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.”** Because the Levitical system was tied into the Mosaic Law, the priesthood of Christ necessitates a new covenant. The point is that with the old priesthood, there was an old covenant. Now, with the new priesthood, there is a new covenant. The word **“covenant”** is from the Greek word *diathēkē* (dia-thy-kay) meaning to make a solemn agreement involving reciprocal benefits and responsibilities. Here we have the first direct allusion to the New Covenant. We will examine this new covenant in chapter 8. For now, notice the word **“guarantor”** in verse 22 - it is the Greek word **“engyos”** meaning to attest to with a hollow hand or open hand. We give our word or oath with an open hand shake showing we have nothing to hide and this

is our bond to make the pledge happen. Jesus always keeps His word or pledge. This word “*engyos*” is only used here in the New Testament and it differs from mediator. A mediator is one who brings two parties together, but a **guarantor** is the one who takes it upon himself to make sure, to guarantee, that the responsibilities, requirements and benefits imposed will be fulfilled.

Let me give you an illustration of an individual’s attempt to guarantee something. If you remember the story of Joseph, you know that he had been sold into slavery by his brothers. After 14 years of slavery, he ends up the number two man in Egypt. At this time there is a great famine in the land so Joseph's dad sends his brothers to Egypt to find food.

Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him. Joseph declares they are spies against Egypt in Genesis chapter 42, and demanded they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin to Egypt to prove they are not spies. Remember Joseph and Benjamin have the same mother, Rachel; the other brothers are half-brothers. Judah goes back to his father, Israel and pleads with him, saying he will guarantee Benjamin’s safety and his return. Judah swore to his father the only way to obtain food so they would not starve and to gain the freedom of Simeon, who is back in Egypt, was for Benjamin to stand before the governor of Egypt. Judah told his father, Israel, “**Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. ⁹ I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.**” (Genesis 43:8-9) The problem is Judah did not have control and when they arrived in Egypt, Joseph the governor wants to keep Benjamin, for he is the brother Joseph loves. Judah addresses Joseph saying, ³⁰ “**Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, ³¹ as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. ³² For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.’ ³³ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a**

servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. ³⁴ For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me?” (Genesis 44:30-34) Judah’s only hope to live up to the oath he gave his father and fulfill his role as guarantor is to take the place of Benjamin as captive in Egypt and allow the other to return. But, Joseph is in control and only because he relents and shows his brother who he really is do things work out.

In the Old Covenant, there was no guarantor of the covenant between God and man from man’s side. But in the New Covenant the Lord Jesus Christ is our guarantor and surety. Jesus alone is qualified and has the authority as both God and man to give Himself voluntarily as the sacrifice and thus guaranteeing that the obligations that mankind has towards God their Creator are met in full. Jesus Christ says to the Father, in effect, “Charge to my account whatever my people owe and I will fully pay their debts.” The unsaved do not understand the significance of what Jesus did, but I hope as a Christian - you do.

Guarantor

Let me tie this in with what we talked about last week about disannulling the law. I said that as believers in Jesus Christ, we are not under the law of Moses. What does it mean to be under the law? Moses taught the people, ²⁴ And “the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. ²⁵ And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.” (Deuteronomy 6:24-25) Therefore, to be under the law means one obtains righteousness or a right standing with God by obedience to the law. This is why Jesus said, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20) God demands perfect righteousness. Who lives up to this standard? No one! Therefore, the need for an eternal priest to make the perfect sacrifice for us is essential.

This is why Paul explained, ⁸“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith ...**” (Philippians 3:8-9) Paul had spent his whole adult life trying to gain righteousness by the law, but he had none until he gave his life to Christ. You see the self-righteous, like Paul had been, could not earn a right standing before God. Paul had a misplaced zeal for God trying to earn righteousness, but failed – only when he came to Christ broken, did he receive Christ’s perfect righteousness. As he wrote to the Corinthians, **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Corinthians 5:21) We are righteous not because of what we do, that is legalism, but we stand righteous before God because of what Christ had done for us. If this is true, does God’s moral law serve a purpose in the life of a believer? Yes! It reveals our sin and helplessness and causes us to look to God for grace. It tells us how we may live in order to show our love for God. We live in obedience to God out of love, not out of fear of condemnation and judgement.

Jesus is our surety, our guarantor. He obeyed the law perfectly and He died a substitutionary death for our sins. We do not gain righteousness by obedience to the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus, is our surety, He is our guarantor, He is the one who is responsible to see that the obligations that we have towards God are met in full. Not only is Jesus our guarantor, but He is also God’s surety. He is the guarantee on the part of God the Father that all of the divine promises will be fulfilled. What the author of Hebrews is saying is that by reason of the oath attached to Christ’s priesthood we can be assured that all of the obligations, both God’s toward us and ours towards God, will be met in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Perfector

The writer further develops the thought that our Lord Jesus Christ's priesthood is not based on some physical requirements but on the basis of His personhood. The priests of Israel were mortal, and therefore, they were many. Jesus is eternal and therefore One. Verses 23 and 24 tells us that the Old Testament priests died, and thus they had to pass on their priesthood, "The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever." This statement is based on the Book of Numbers chapter 20 where God had Moses bring Aaron to Mount Hor before the people and removed his priestly robes and placed them on Aaron's son Eleazar (el·aw·zawr). Aaron remained on Mount Hor and died. Later after Canaan was settled Eleazar died as read in Joshua chapter 24 and he was succeeded by his son and so on from generation to generation until the fall of the temple in 70 AD. In the Levitical priesthood system, Aaron could not be replaced as a priest until he died. God's intention was always for the priesthood of man to give way to Christ's because He never dies, He will never be replaced, and His priesthood will never change.

Do you see the difference between the two priesthoods? Christ is eternal, His priesthood is unchangeable. The Greek word used here for "permanently" is rare because it is absolute, it is "*aparabatos*" and it means to not pass away or it is untransferable or is eternal. Now the Lord Jesus Christ died, but that was not the termination of His priesthood. His death in itself was a priestly act. The other priests offered animal sacrifices, but Christ offered Himself once for all; unlike the mortal priests who made offering after offering, as the writer states in chapter 9, verse 26 "for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The Old Testament Israelite must have endured great anxiety over their priestly system. They may have loved and respected their high priest and would have found comfort in going repeatedly to the same priest knowing that he would effectively secure for them a hearing in the presence of God on the day of atonement. But what about the priest's successor, would he be a good man; would

he adequately represent them before God? This never comes into question with our Lord Jesus Christ for His priesthood is perfect and it will never be succeeded.

Whether it was the corrupt priests of Israel, like the sons of Eli or Catholic priests or Protestant pastors - under the Old Testament law we understand the sins of a priest brought sin on the people. “If it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people ...” (Leviticus 4:3a) Couple this with, “If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?” (1 Samuel 2:25) It becomes obvious what the problem is; all men are sinners. The answer to man’s sin is also clear, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6) Christ is the perfect priest and perfect sacrifice to solve man’s sin problem.

Savior

We, my beloved, do not have to worry about sin overcoming our High Priest. We have a perfect High Priest, He is not mortal, and He is not sinful, and He will never be succeeded by another. As the writer continues in verse 25, “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” Jesus Christ is able to save completely. The word “save” used here is the Greek word “*sozo*”. Here the verb *sozo*’s meaning is determined by the context of the passage; *sozo* means the strength to endure the trials of the world. In other words, “those who draw near to God through” Jesus will be given the strength to endure, just as Stephen was given and they will be delivered from earth to heaven.

Not only does Christ’s priesthood, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16) it also keeps us secure in Him, when we fall through sin and repent. In order to understand the eternal security of the believer, it is imperative that we understand the Melchizedekian priesthood. The priesthood of Melchizedek is eternal; it is Jesus who

saves us to the uttermost. Because of Jesus' work, we know this truth, He said, **“this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** (John 6:39-40) So, when verse 25 says, Jesus **“is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him”** the word **“uttermost”** can literally be translated as forever and completely. Christ is able to save for eternity as well as thoroughly or completely. How long is a believer saved when he trusts in the person and work of Christ? Forever! What is left for one to do in order to be sure they are saved? Nothing! They are saved completely! This truth takes away any claim by any denomination that says one must have good works in order to be saved. There is nothing left for us to do after we become a believer in Christ other than live for His glory and our good works are based on our love of Christ and His people. This is possible only because Jesus Christ is an eternal priest and this is why true believers are eternally secure. Picture this in your mind, Jesus in heaven is not to be thought of as pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God, but as a throned King-Priest, asking He will from His Father who always hears and grants His requests for they are perfect in unity. To rely upon angels or saints or idols or any other finite being for their intercession before God is not only futile, it also betrays a failure of confidence in the adequacy of Christ as our intercessor, and it is to honor the creature, which is heresy. We are to worship Jesus alone who is our Creator and Redeemer.

Verse 26 reads, **“For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.”** The new priesthood is superior simply because of who the new priest is. He is the Son of God. The word **“holy”** as used here for Christ is not the normal Greek word for holy **“*hagios*”** that is used to describe saints. *Hagios* means “to be set apart from sin and belonging to God.” In verse 26, **“*hosios*”** is a word used to describe the personal character of Jesus Christ. It is used in Revelation 15:4 which declares, **“Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy.”** In like manner, in Revelation 16:5 the angel

declares to Christ, **“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was ...”** This word **“*hosios*”** refers to holiness in an absolute sense; one who absolutely pure and only God is absolutely pure. This word **“holy”** has a messianic connotation to it as this same word is used in Acts, **“For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.”** (Acts 2:27) Again, later in Acts, **“Therefore he says also in another psalm** (Psalm 16:10), **‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’ ”** (Acts 13:35) As Jesus is uniquely God’s Holy One, it is essential, **if** we are to be able to stand before God, that we stand by faith in Jesus.

Jesus is also said to be **“innocent”** in person and character; He is blameless, He is entirely free from all that is evil and harmful, both in action and motivation. He is also **“unstained”**. The Old Testament priests were to be undefiled. It was a requirement that they be ceremonial purified before they could enter the Holy of Holies. They had to be undefiled physically. Leviticus chapters 21 and 22 list 142 blemishes that could disqualify a priest. But these priest’s lack of defilement was external. All these external features had a purpose, it was God’s way of telling the people that to enter into His presence, you had to be perfect. These physical aspects pointed out the need but were unable to make one spiritually clean and perfect. When we read that Jesus Christ was undefiled, which is a clear reference to these requirements, He is undefiled inherently for He is the Son.

Verse 26 also says Jesus is **“separated from sinners”** this is because the verse states Jesus is **“holy, innocent, unstained”**. Now, you may be saying to yourself, “Wait a minute does not the scriptures teach “Christ is identified with sinners?” You are thinking of the prophet Isaiah who wrote of the Messiah, who was to come in the future or Jesus Christ, **“because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”** (Isaiah 53:12) Jesus does identify with us sinners because He came to earth as God and man, God incarnate, but He never sinned. This is the reason Jesus is the One who is able to bring salvation to mankind. If Jesus had become a human being and sinned this would have placed him in the same predicament as all the human priests and all mankind. So, Jesus does identify with us and

at the same time He is the only one who has lived that fulfilled the law perfectly and remained sinless. As the writer stated clearly earlier in chapter 4, verse 15 and 16, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, **yet without sin.**”¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Verse 26 ends with stating Jesus is, “**exalted above the heavens**” which is referring to Jesus’ resurrection, ascension and glorification and because of this then verse 27 becomes clear, “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since **he did this once for all** when he offered up himself.” The contrast between the priests and Jesus is dealt with by the author in chapter 10. But it is important to note here the phrase used to end the verse “**he did this once for all when he offered up himself**”, it attests to the eternal completeness and value of this one sacrifice for sin and confirms the abolition of any other sacrificial system. The words, “**he offered up himself**” takes us back to the beginning of this letter,² “**in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.**”³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. **After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**” (Hebrews 1:2-3) Jesus is like the sinners He came to save and yet sinless as the writer put forth,¹⁷ “**Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**”¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Hebrews 2:17-18) Do you see how the writer is building his case that Jesus is the perfect and eternal High Priest step-by-step? He is demonstrating to these converted Jews to consider returning to Judaism would be like a dog returning to its vomit. Jesus is the perfect High Priest. It is because Jesus is the final perfect High Priest that Paul was able to write and we can affirm with Paul,²⁰ “**I have been crucified with Christ. It is**

no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And **the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” (Galatians 2:20-21) Jesus, unlike human priests, did not offer a lamb or bull, He gave himself the only perfect, unblemished and eternal Lamb.

The problem with other sacrificial systems; like the Jews slaughtering lambs at the Passover each year, they are making worthless and unnecessary sacrifices for Jesus has come and Catholics in their transubstantiation of the eucharist during Mass re-sacrifice the person of Christ each Sunday. Christ has come, so any system of sacrifice is not needed and goes against the Scriptures. It is not limited to Jews and Catholics; there are Protestant denominations they practice things like re-generational baptism, which also says Christ’s death and resurrection were not enough to save us. People cannot add anything or help in any way or take any responsibility for their salvation and these manmade attempts are sin.

The writer closes this chapter with a summary statement in verse 28, “**For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.**” Here the author is clear when he uses the word “**weakness**” referring to the fact that the priests before Christ were mortal and sinful and therefore weak. The fact that they died testifies that their priesthood was temporary and that they were sinners they had to offer sacrifices on their own behalf and their sins could nullify their offerings. In all these respects Christ is far superior; He is perfect, eternal and sinless.

My beloved, Jesus Christ is our High Priest, He is God’s provision for help in living our lives, for **Jesus is incomparable in greatness, inexhaustible in resource, infinite in patience, infallible in wisdom and loves each person as no other can.** Believers, come to Jesus with all your needs, He is the only One able to save completely. Amen!